ENHANCING THE TARGET'S EFFECT: CRIME SCENES IN IRAQ

By Captain Joshua P. Rowan, FA

It was 28 February 2007, and I was positioned along a wall outside a target house in Baghdad with my platoon. It was my first deployment and raid, and the adrenaline was flowing freely. The assault team breeched the outer gate, then the inner gate. There was a few more seconds of radio silence, then the call came over the radio that the target house was clear and secure. I walked into the house where all eyes were on me, waiting for my plan to exploit the house and process the high-value target (HVT).

At the Field Artillery (FA) schoolhouse at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, officers learn many useful things, but unfortunately sensitive-site exploitation (SSE) is a subject that is still foreign to many Artillerymen. In today's contemporary operating environment (COE), SSE is a necessary skill for all Soldiers, including Artillerymen. This article discusses the basics of SSE in a combat environment, but does not serve as the final word on the subject.

What is SSE? SSE is defined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as, "a systematic search of a secure location which permits the collection of information leading to the development of tacti-cal, operational or strategic intelligence and provides evidence that can be used in the prosecution and conviction of detainees."[1] Locations may include, but are not limited to, apartment buildings, residences, multiple structures, compounds, fields, traffic control points (TCPs), improvised explosive device (IED) sites or any combination of these.

Artillerymen of all stripes now are being asked to conduct this difficult and, often, foreign task in theater. Why? Beyond the obvious answer that Artillerymen have become a sort of "jack-of-all-trades" for the Army at large, Artillerymen are known for their trademark ability to adhere to rigorous

standards of precision—a must during the exploitation process.

A good SSE is conducted in as detailed and thorough a manner as time and the objective permits. This allows prosecutors to get convictions and keep those insurgents and terrorists off the streets. For example, between October and December 2004, the Central Criminal Court of Iraq reviewed 2,865 cases, and 2,118 cases were deemed "no prosecute" and sent to the US' Combined Review and Release Board which released the detainees. This means that the same individual detained one night could be back on the street several weeks later; a prospect that simply is unacceptable.

As one handout notes, "the more evidence you collect on the objective, the more chance that detainees will be detained for extended periods. The amount of evidence you collect determines, more than anything else, if the detainee will be sent to Central Criminal Court of Iraq … where, if convicted, they face up to 20 years imprisonment, or to the Combined Review and Release Board… where they are eligible for release in six months or less."[2]

Creating the SSE Team. Good SSE starts during preparation for deployment at home station. Some may argue that any platoon member can serve on the SSE team on a rotational basis. However, this does not facilitate the standard of precision that we have come to expect as Artillerymen. A good section chief would never think of rotating his seasoned gunner out before a fire mission. Why then would it be acceptable to rotate seasoned personnel on the platoon's SSE team?

At the battery level, the platoon leader designates the members of the SSE team. At a minimum, the following team members must be designated: SSE coordinator (usually the platoon leader), SSE team leader, a two-man search team, a photographer and a sketcher. A good general rule is that an SSE team should have no more than six, but no fewer than three members.

Within our platoon, we are limited on manpower but have an SSE coordinator, an SSE NCO-in-charge, one sketch artist and a two-paratrooper search team. As with any good battle drill, each team member has assigned tasks.

The SSE coordinator is responsible for the overall collection, analysis and processing of the intelligence gathered on the objective and choreographs all the "moving pieces" on the SSE team. On our SSE team, this individual also

properly marks the rooms before beginning the SSE procedures and ensures that the chain of command is updated on the status of the SSE process.

The SSE team leader designates a consolidation point and initiates and monitors the SSE. This Soldier receives, screens and inspects all material for proper markings, making sure to enforce the unit's standard operating procedure (SOP) for marking evidence. He sends all status reports to the SSE coordinator.

The two-man search team receives guidance from the SSE team leader then conducts the search, screens materials and bags and marks all gathered materials. In each room, the team members consolidate their evidence at a predesignated point and move forward to the next room as directed by the SSE team leader. The photographer takes pictures of the evidence as it is collected.

If resources permit, a good interpreter should be dedicated to the SSE team. This individual can help with the on-scene analysis of documents, photos, technical manuals or electronics.

Most importantly, he can use his knowledge of the area and culture to tell the SSE team if something seems out of place. For example, one SSE instructor told a story about one unit's interpreter alerting his team to the fact that a particular room being searched was smaller than it should have been for a house that size. After further investigation, the team discovered that a false wall had been built. When the wall was removed, they found a large weapons cache.

Building the SSE Kit. Once the team has been established, an SSE kit must be developed. For those deploying who are lucky enough to attend an SSE class in theater, they will receive an exceptionally good SSE kit. Other teams have to build their SSE kits from scratch. A good SSE kit includes the items listed in the figure.

The SSE coordinator needs to ensure that "personal detainee bags" are constructed before leaving for a mission. These can be made by taping an arm's-length of 550-pound cord to the back of several ziplock bags and inserting a note card in the bag. The following categories should be included on each note card: objective name, date-time group, subject's name and contents of the bag.

After arriving in theater, the SSE coordinator should search out subject matter experts (SMEs) in his area of operations (AO). This can include individuals from

explosive ordinance disposal (EOD), weapons intelligence teams, tactical human intelligence (THT), engineers and others. Three groups—Task Force Troy (available only on Secure Internet Protocol Net), the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) (http://call.army.mil) and the Asymmetric Warfare Group (http://www.awg.army.mil)—have excellent websites that should be used. In addition, the SSE coordinator should begin working with the S2 shop to learn the enemy's most recent tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs).[3] Armed with this information and organized with the proper equipment, the SSE team is ready for its first mission.

Conducting SSE. Once a platoon sergeant announces a house is clear and secure, including personal searches of all detainees, the SSE team can enter the objective. The first task is segregating any local nationals into three groups. If space permits, the team places all females and children in the first room, the target in the second room and all other personnel in a third room.

The platoon sergeant and several platoon members begin a thorough search of the outside yard using a metal detector to locate any weapons or IED materials.

- Simcard Reader
- Detainee Paperwork
- Document Protectors
- Medical Scissors
- X-Spray/Gun Shot Residue Test Kit
- Permanent Markers
- Shoe Tags
- Retainer Bands
- 550-pound Cord
- Chemlights (Different Colors)
- Headlamps
- Note Cards
- Small White Marker Board with Dry-Erase Markers
- Medical Gloves
- Memory Stick
- Digital Camera with Cord
- Flexible Ties
- Safety Pins
- Sketch Pad and Pencils
- Detainee Hoods or Desert Scarves
- Ziplock Bags
- Metal Detector
- Biometrics System
- Probe for Checking Trash

A good sensitive-site exploitation (SSE) kit includes these items.

All other Soldiers move to security positions outside. This allows the SSE team to move about the house without interference. The SSE team leader then takes the two-man search team and photographer to the first room to be processed. Preferably, they should process a room that is not occupied by detainees.

Simultaneously, the SSE coordinator and the sketch artist start at the front of the house and label every room using the platoon SOP. Our unit's SOP is to begin at the building's main point of entry. This becomes "Room A." The rooms are labeled with a black marker on the upper-right portion of the door frame in a left-to-right or clockwise manner.

When all rooms are marked properly, the sketch artist begins to draw the house's layout and label the rooms on his sketch. Once he has completed this task, he joins the search team.

At this point, the search team actively is conducting SSE on each room. Before beginning in each room, the SSE team leader ensures that everyone is wearing a fresh pair of medical gloves, preventing the SSE team from contaminating the evidence.

Each search-team member starts on a different side of the room and works his way around the entire room. Each searches low, medium and high, paying special attention for any false walls and floors, cutouts, items hidden in the wood, under rugs and above ceiling coverings. The team leader ensures that no one except the SSE coordinator enters the room while it is being exploited. This technique prevents distractions and allows the search teams to be as thorough as possible.

SSE team members must remember as they search that destructive behavior that does not uncover evidence is counterproductive. Teams should take time and search everything carefully, identify the necessary items to be removed and try to discover actionable, strategic intelligence rather than simply create a backlog for personnel at the detention facility.

Items of interest include passports, letters, pictures, phone lists, communication or navigation equipment, enemy forces propaganda (leaflets, books or pamphlets) and weapons or ammunition known or suspected to have been used in enemy activity against Coalition Forces or that are excessive in nature beyond personal protection.

When the team finds evidence, the photographer takes a picture of the item in the exact position and location where it was found. The SSE team leader then ensures the item is placed in a ziplock bag, along with a note card labeled with the objective name, room number, date-time group and contents of the bag. When conducting SSE at night or in minimal light conditions, placing a different colored chemlight in the bag for each room can facilitate easier identification. After a room is inspected thoroughly, the team members take all evidence to the predetermined consolidation point. Before leaving each room, the photographer takes one last photograph of the overall condition of the room.

The SSE coordinator then sends his situation report to higher headquarters and coordinates with one of the guards to move a set of detainees to the completed room while the remainder of the SSE team moves to the next room.

The team should not skip rooms. For example, if there are 10 rooms, searchers start at room one and finish at 10 or vice versa. The exploitation process is repeated in each room until the structure has been searched thoroughly. As the SSE team leader completes a room, he lines through the number written on the house layout sketch. This allows the SSE coordinator to track the exploitation's progress. As each room is searched, guards move another detainee or group of detainees into the cleared room. However, the guards do not move the detainees until THT has completed their questioning.

Once all rooms and personnel are exploited thoroughly, the SSE team sets up for a photo known affectionately as the "money shot." The team chooses a room with a big floor space and lays out all collected items and evidence on the floor. Each item is taken out of and placed on top of its respective ziplock bag. There must be enough space between items so that they can be identified easily by detainee inprocessing and law enforcement personnel. When all evidence is displayed properly, the photographer takes a photo of all the items, making sure there are no people in the photo.

The SSE team uses a small dry-erase board to write the key information about the detainee. At a minimum, the team should list objective's name, detainee's name, date-time group and grid on the board. Then the photographer places the detainee and completed board behind the evidence, clears all coalition personnel from the photo area and takes the final picture. It is recommended that the photographer takes several photos in case the original does not turn out.

Once all photos are taken, team members place each piece of the evidence back in its respective bag and pack all of the bags in some type of duffle or aviator's kit bag. The SSE team leader ensures that all personal items are removed from the detainee and placed in one of the premade "personal detainee bags" and placed around the detainee's neck. This bag must be labeled properly with the following categories: objective name, room number, date-time group and contents of the bag.

After clearing the objective and loading all detainees and evidence into vehicles, the platoon returns to the combat observation post (COP) or forward operating base (FOB). The SSE team writes sworn statements, does sketches and transfers all evidence and pictures to the intelligence section. The S2 section will have specific instructions on which forms are required.

As with every good Army operation, the final step is the after action review (AAR). This step may be the most critical step because SSE is a learning process that adapts and evolves based on new equipment and changes in the enemy TTPs.

SSE teams that consistently and diligently conduct the basic steps of the process and follow each exploitation process with a thorough AAR will develop skilled team members who produce solid convictions.

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